



IT'S FOR

(and Mammals, Amphibians,

THE BIRDS!

Fish, Wild Flowers, Reptiles, Insects ...)

Nobody likes to do their taxes, but if you care about the future of our wildlife and wild places, please consider making a crucial donation while you're filling out your state tax form...

Since 1983, the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP) has been an integral part of the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife (MDFW). Over the past 23 years, this Program has focused on conserving rare species and important habitats not addressed through the agency's more traditional programs.

Throughout this period, the NHESP has conducted inventory, research and management projects to document, verify and conserve rare native species protected by the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act (MESA), and to identify and map the

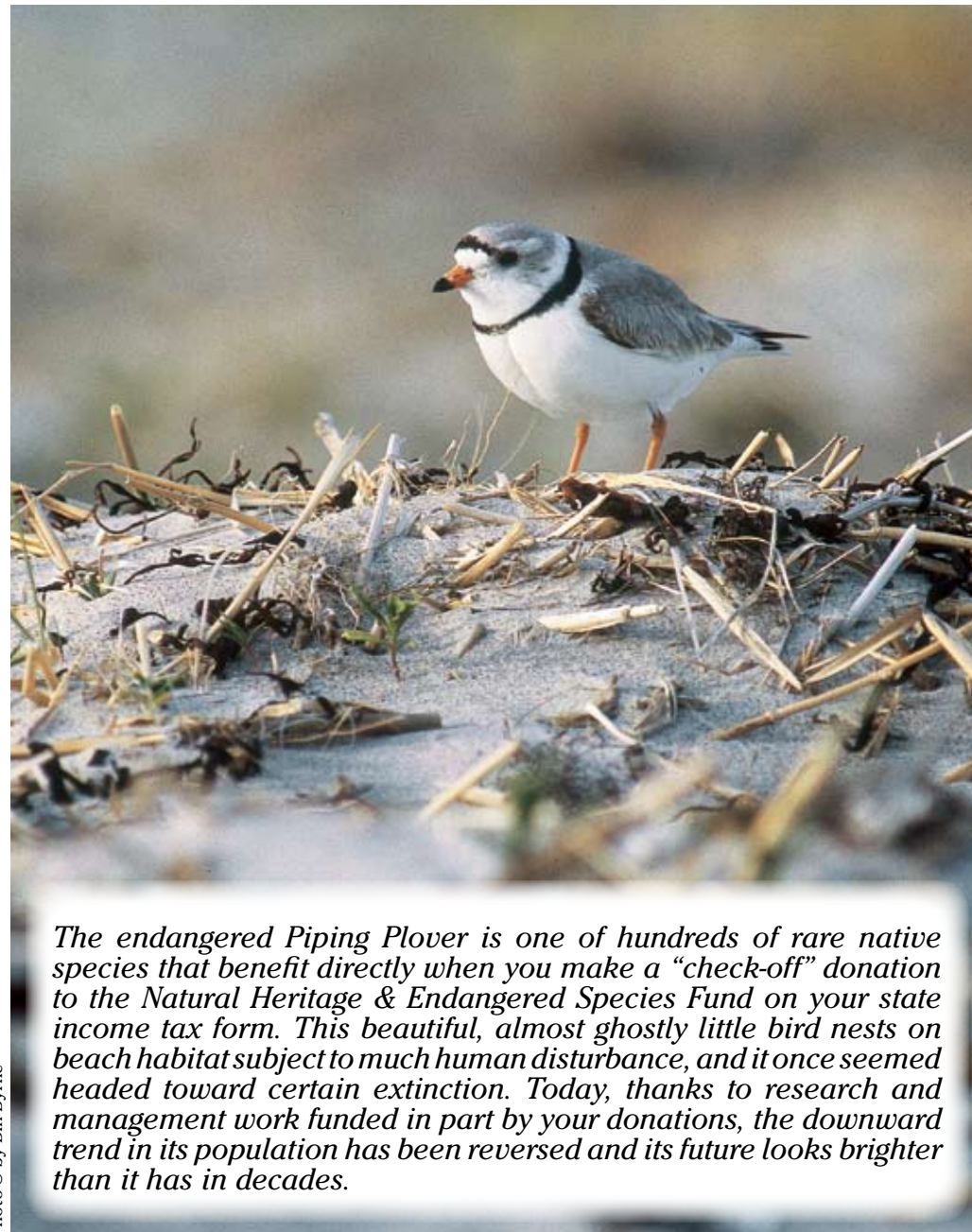
key habitats essential to the existence of those species. NHESP also certifies vernal pool habitats, sponsors biodiversity conservation activities, and delineates and maps rare species habitats. Perhaps most important, it stands squarely on the front line in defense of wildlife by conducting environmental reviews of every proposed building or development project that could seriously impact the habitat of any MESA-protected species.

The Division of Fisheries & Wildlife is largely self-supported. Most of its funding comes from hunting and fishing license sales and federal excise taxes on hunting



The Box Turtle, a terrestrial turtle that may live for a century or more, has declined precipitously in just the past few decades due to road mortality, illegal collection and habitat loss. Your "check-off" donation will help preserve its habitat, fund research and keep populations viable so its future can be secured.

Photo © by Bill Byrne



The endangered Piping Plover is one of hundreds of rare native species that benefit directly when you make a "check-off" donation to the Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Fund on your state income tax form. This beautiful, almost ghostly little bird nests on beach habitat subject to much human disturbance, and it once seemed headed toward certain extinction. Today, thanks to research and management work funded in part by your donations, the downward trend in its population has been reversed and its future looks brighter than it has in decades.

Photo © by Bill Byrne



The endangered Black Rat Snake might not be everyone's idea of a beautiful wildlife species, but like all our native fauna this naturally rare reptile — the largest snake found in New England — benefits from work conducted by the NHESP.

and fishing equipment. It does not receive general tax revenues from the state. Yet the agency's conservation work clearly benefits *all* of the state's people. When the Heritage Program came on board, it would have been even more unfair to suggest that our sportsmen should also serve as its sole source of funding.

The Massachusetts legislature moved to address this issue in 1983 by passing a bill that allowed taxpayers to contribute to the Natural Heritage Program on their state income tax returns. Taxpayers could either add to their payment due, or designate a portion of their tax refund if they were due one. This was a new approach to funding, the first "check-off" to appear on Massachusetts tax forms. As a promotional poster developed at the time proclaimed, the donations line was "for the birds!"

The "check-off" option has been in place for more than 20 years, and a dedicated group of conservationists and sportsmen — some 20,000 of them — donate to it each year. While this is a substantial number of donors, it is small in proportion to the state's entire tax-filing population. Professional tax preparers may be reluctant to suggest *adding on* to a tax payment, and individuals who do their

own taxes may be too exhausted or frustrated by the time they reach the contribution line near the end of the form to give it the consideration it deserves.

Nonetheless, the "check-off" has been quite productive. The first year the donation option was available, 100,000 donors provided more than \$375,000! It wasn't long before this success prompted other causes to seek the same privilege. Four other options have since been added



The security of more than 250 species of rare native plants depends in large part on the inventory, research, mapping, habitat protection and environmental review carried out by the NHESP. Your donations help!

Photos © by Bill Byrne

to the tax form and the charitable dollar has been stretched thin. Despite this, our wildlife conservation donors have been consistent and, over two decades, have provided **\$6.2 million dollars** for the conservation of wildlife through their tax form contributions.

These donated funds, together with supplements from the Inland Fish and Game Fund and legislative appropriations from the state's General Fund, have supported the Natural Heritage Program since its inception, but it has received no operating funds from the state's General Fund since 2004. While the Inland Fish and Game Fund continues to underwrite certain overhead costs such as office space and telephones, the Program currently depends on discretionary project-related bond funds, federal reimbursements, and fees (established in 2005) collected for endangered species reviews of development projects to continue its crucial conservation mission.

Materials developed by the Heritage Program — including the BioMap, Atlas of Priority and Estimated Habitats, and Living Waters Core Habitat maps — are used statewide by local land trusts, conservation commissions and nonprofit organizations to inform land protection efforts. But as threats to our rare species and natural habitats increase, public demands for information about the state's biodiversity and its conservation also increase. Clearly the utility and need for the Program continues to grow. Given the chronic lack of stable funding, the MDFW and a number of conservation partners are seeking permanent support for this important and ongoing function of state government. Please ask your state legislators to support adding funds for the Natural Heritage Program back into the General Fund budget.



In the meantime, the annual opportunity to show *your* support for wildlife conservation is here. We, as individuals, have a unique opportunity to invest in the future of the Commonwealth. Take a close look on your Massachusetts income tax form and confirm the fact that there is something there "for the birds" (and all our other native wildlife species). To those who have donated over the years, we extend a sincere Thank You! For those who haven't, please join us in supporting this important wildlife conservation effort. It's not just the birds that benefit: the future of *all* our endangered wildlife resources depends on you!

